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Tuesday, September 08, 2015

Predatory Publishing: A Modest Proposal

What many now refer to as predatory publishing first came to my attention 7 years ago, when I interviewed a publisher who — I had been told — was bombarding researchers with invitations to submit papers to, and sit on the editorial boards of, the hundreds of new OA journals it was launching.

Since then I have undertaken a number of other such interviews, and with each interview the allegations have tended to become more worrying — e.g. that the publisher is levying article-processing charges but not actually sending papers out for review, that it is publishing junk science, that it is claiming to be a member of a publishing organisation when in reality it is not a member, that it is deliberately choosing journal titles that are the same, or very similar, to those of prestigious journals (or even directly cloning titles) in order to fool researchers into submitting papers to it etc. etc.

As the allegations became more serious I found myself repeatedly telling OA advocates that unless something was done to address the situation the movement would be confronted with a serious problem. But far too little has been done, and so the number of predatory publishers has continued to grow, and the cries of alarm are becoming more widespread.

Initially, the OA movement responded by saying that it was not a real problem because most so-called predatory journals had few if any papers in them, so there could be very few researchers affected.

Nevertheless, the number of publishers listed by Jeffrey Beall as "potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers" has grown year by year. Since 2011 Beall's list has increased from just 18 publishers to 693. One has to ask: why would there have been a 3,750% increase in this number if only a handful of people ever use the journals?

When it became harder to sweep the problem aside, OA advocates shifted ground, and began to argue that while there may be an issue it was only a problem for researchers in the developing world.

But is that response not simply another way of trying to suggest that there isn't really a problem? Either way, why would the problem be any less important if the only victims were researchers based in the developing world?

In any case, I do not believe it to be an accurate characterisation. When a recent ABC Background Briefing examined the activities of one suspect publisher's operations in Australia it concluded that there was a real problem down under. And Australia can hardly be described as a developing country.

Call me a sceptic

My own personal experience likewise suggests that the problem is somewhat more widespread and worrying than is generally acknowledged. I am regularly contacted by researchers who have fallen foul of dubious OA publishers. Yes, some of these researchers are based in the developing world, but a good number are based in the developed world, and some are even based in prestigious North American universities.

So call me a sceptic over claims that predatory publishing is not a serious issue, or that it is only impacting on those based in the developing world.

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Please note the postscript to this interview here The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...

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I'd also have to say that when I contact universities where those who have asked me for help are based, or big publishers whose journal titles have been used as bait to gull researchers into submitting to a predatory journal, I don't get the feeling that there is much willingness to help the victims, to tackle the problem, or even to confront it.

For their part, OA advocates often also resort to arguing that subscription publishers are also predatory, so why does not Beall include them in his list as well? While this may be true, it is not particularly helpful, or relevant, in the context of seeking a solution to the problem of predatory OA journals.

So we are left with a growing problem but little effort being put into resolving it.

What we do have is a white list run by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and a blacklist run by a single individual (Jeffrey Beall).

One problem with the white list approach is that it can too easily become an exclusive club (excluding, say, journals based in the developing world). Moreover, the management of DOAJ has not been trouble free. Last year, for instance, it had to remove over 650 journals from its database after it decided it needed to tighten up its selection criteria and ask publishers to re-apply for inclusion. This was necessary because it had become clear that predatory journals were finding their way into the database. But as predatory journal buster John Bohannon has pointed out, the real problem is that DOAJ doesn't have sufficient resources to be very effective. DOAJ is, he says, "fighting an uphill battle to identify all of literature's 'fake journals'."

As a lone individual, the challenge for Beall is that much greater. It is no surprise therefore that he and his blacklist are frequently (and often bitterly) criticised for including publishers without sufficient evidence that they are indeed predatory. In any case, add OA advocates, Beall is "anti-OA", and so his list should be completely ignored. Of course, it is always much easier to criticise someone who is trying to solve a problem than to do something about it yourself.

So what is the solution? Personally, I think the problem needs to be approached from a different direction.

What is surely relevant here is that in order to practise their trade predatory publishers depend on the co-operation of researchers, not least because they have to persuade a sufficient number to sit on their editorial boards in order to have any credibility. Without an editorial board a journal will struggle to attract many submissions.

This suggests that if a journal is predatory then all those researchers sitting on its editorial and advisory boards are to some extent also predatory, or at least they are conspiring in the publisher's predatory behaviour. After all, if members of the editorial board of a journal that was engaging in predatory activity wanted to end or curtail that activity they could join together and resign, or threaten to resign.

Yes, I know some researchers have their names listed on journal editorial boards without their permission, or perhaps even knowledge. But the majority do so because it looks good on their CV. And in accepting an invitation to be associated with a journal most ask far too few questions about the publisher, and do far too little research into its activities, before saying yes. ABC found over 200 Australian researchers sitting on the editorial boards of just one predatory publisher. I am confident that most if not all of these agreed to sit on the boards.

So my question is this: Do these researchers not have some responsibility for any predatory behaviour the publisher engages in? Personally, I think the answer is yes!

What to do?

So what to do? Here I have a modest proposal. I don't know whether it is practical or feasible, but I make the proposal anyway, if only to try and get people to think more seriously about solutions rather than excuses.

Why does the OA movement not create a database containing all the names of researchers who sit on the editorial and/or advisory boards of the publishers on Beall's list, along with the names of the journals with which they are associated? Such a database could perhaps serve a number of purposes:

- It could be used as a way of cross checking the appropriateness of a publisher/journal being listed on Beall's site. It would at least surely focus minds, and hopefully encourage editorial boards to demonstrate (if they can) that their publisher/journal has been inappropriately placed on Beall's list, or do something

(A print version of this eBook is available here) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology libraria...

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PLOS CEO Alison Mudditt discusses new OA agreement with the University of California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...

about it, if only by resigning. To help trigger this process researchers listed in the database could be contacted and told that their name was in it.

- The database could help those thinking of submitting to a journal listed in it to more easily find and contact members of its editorial board, and before submitting ask them to personally vouch for the quality of the review process. If things then went wrong the submitting researcher could take the issue up with those board members s/he had contacted. There is nothing quite like personal recommendation, and the personal responsibility that accompanies it.

- Researchers could also search on the database before agreeing to sit on an editorial board as part of a due diligence process. If the publisher/journal is listed in the database they could contact board members and ask them to personally vouch for the quality of the journal.

- Researchers could search the database for their own names in order to establish whether they have been listed on an editorial board without their permission or knowledge.

- Such a database could also quickly reveal how many journals on Beall's list a particular researcher was associated with.

- If editorial board members' institutions were included in the database regular Top 10 lists could be published showing the institutions that had the greatest number of board members of journals in Beall's list. Would that not also focus minds?

- And if countries were included Top 10 lists of those could be published too.

I am sure people would also come up with other uses for such a database.

As I say, I don't know how practical my proposal is, or whether anyone would be willing to take it on — but it is worth noting that ABC has already produced a list of board members of the journals of one publisher (although without the name of the relevant journal attached). This suggests that it is feasible. In fact, creating such a database would be a great candidate for a crowdsourcing project.

Above all, such an initiative would make an important point: responsibility for predatory behaviour needs to be pushed back to the research community.

As Cameron Neylon points out, we need to move beyond the point of seeing researchers as "hapless victims". They are active agents in scholarly communication, and when the publishing practices of journals with which they are associated turn out to be inadequate or deceptive researchers ought to take responsibility, not just point the finger at rogue publishers.

In any case, it is surely past time for the research community to step up and grasp this nettle.

On a more general note, creating public databases of researchers on the editorial and advisory boards of journals (both those considered predatory and those not considered so) would make the point that agreeing to be associated with a journal comes with responsibilities, that it is not just a way of padding a CV.

Posted by Richard Poynder at 10:29

43 comments:

Mike Taylor said...

"When it became harder to sweep the problem aside, OA advocates shifted ground, and began to argue that while there may be an issue it was only a problem for researchers in the developing world."

Really?! Who said that?

September 08, 2015 1:52 pm

Mike Taylor said...

"In any case, add OA advocates, Beall is "anti-OA", and so his list should be completely ignored."

Your scare-quotes imply that you think the idea of Beall as anti-OA is far-fetched. Have you read The Open-Access Movement is Not Really about Open Access? It's not easy to imagine a clearer anti-OA manifesto.

Where is the Open Access Foundation?

While the term Open Access (OA) has its origins in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the concept and practice of OA has bee...

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I am not saying that Beall hasn't identified a real problem. I *am* saying that the idea that's anti-OA is not some lunatic-fringe paranoid position, but an unambiguous fact that he has himself expounded at length in the peer-reviewed literature.

September 08, 2015 1:59 pm

Mike Taylor said...

With those quibbles aside ...

I've got no objection to the creation of the database that you suggest beyond (A) the fact that it will be enormous amount of tedious, error-prone work, (B) that it will expose the people who do that work to great ill-feeling and possibly law-suits, and (C) it will lend legitimacy to Beall's List, which is hardly helpful.

My modest proposal for predatory publishing remains what it was always been: if you don't know whether or not a journal is predatory, *do not submit your article to it*. It's the same as the solution to 419 scams. People who are trained as scholarly researchers should -- whether they are from the West or the developing world -- have the skills to determine whether trusted friends and colleagues have published in a given venue and whether they were happy with the result. Any researcher who *can't* do this simple thing ... well, maybe their research is not worth reading.

September 08, 2015 2:06 pm

Jon Baron said...

Starting in May 2014 I started putting all solicitations from predatory journals in a mail file. It now has 228 messages. Every journal in that list has author fees. There was one that looked predatory, but I decided it wasn't when it explicitly said that there were no author fees. I don't see how a journal can be predatory without making money.

Thus, another solution is to drive these journals out of business by launching enough open-access journals with no fees, like the one I edit and produce (Judgment and Decision Making). I have no incentive to publish junk. It is work for me to publish anything, and I get no money for this.

The main thing that seems to prevent more people from doing what I do is that no platform exists that will translate Microsoft Word files into something that does not look so ugly as not to be publishable as an article. Or a platform could provide authors with something else that they can use to compose their article (like Google Docs) that can be easily translated into something that looks nice. Of course, many journals like mine require LaTeX submission with the journal's template, but that won't work for most scholars.

Otherwise, scholarly journals are almost entirely volunteer efforts at every step. Most editors do not get paid. Reviewers don't get paid. Authors don't get paid. All that is needed is a little more volunteer effort. Some editors of proprietary journals even now will actually "edit" papers. And some good software.

In sum, if we could get rid of author fees, everywhere, we remove all incentive for anyone to publish junk.

September 08, 2015 3:29 pm

Pedro Molina Sanchez said...

I like Jon Baron's idea of getting rid of APC's. The reason why I don't think it's going to happen any time soon is because authors want to publish in journals of high IF. This strong demand makes journals an attractive business so they'll keep charging the taxpayer, via the authors, as much as the market can bear. If hiring and funding decisions were made on the basis of the quality of author's publications instead of on the impact factor of the journal, this free-publishing model would work.
Another thought. Predatory journals are so because they publish articles which undergone fake (done by the authors) or no peer-review at all. These peer-review reports are not visible to the reader in the vast majority of journals. The whole system is based on the trust placed by the reader on the journal regarding the peer-review process. If these reports were included in the article, the reader could assess the validity of the process. In this scenario, "predatory journals" would be spotted by the absence, or obvious forgery, of these reports.
Finally, "non-predatory' journals have to be the first to step forward and

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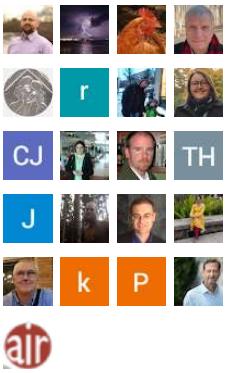

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start being a lot more transparent an release peer reviews. This will back their reputation for being real vehicles of scholarship as opposed to the "predatory" journals.

September 08, 2015 8:21 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Hi Mike,

You ask, who said that predatory publishing is only an issue for those in the developing world. I had thought you were one of those to have said this, but perhaps I misremember.

Anyway, others take this view, most recently I think here.

I am sorry if my use of quotes was ambiguous. The point I was trying to make is that OA advocates appear to have moved to a position in which they say that Beall's contribution should be ignored *not* because they believe his list has no value, but because he is anti-OA. I feel this is to adopt a closed mind approach to the problem.

Certainly Beall's list could be considerably improved, but as I point out Beall is a lone individual who has taken on a huge task. There are, therefore, bound to be errors, and there will inevitably be personal bias. The fact is that it is because the OA movement has shown itself to be unwilling to take on the task itself that Beall was able to move in to fill the vacuum.

That said, I personally believe Beall's list has real value, and I refer to it frequently, whatever its shortcomings. And my guess is that everyone who is concerned about predatory publishing uses it frequently too.

I agree that creating a database like the one I propose would be a big task, which is why I suggested a crowdsourcing approach. If it helps, it took a journalist two hours to put together the list of Australian researchers who sit on the boards of the journals of the publisher ABC investigated.

On the issue of adding legitimacy to Beall's list, I suggested that one use that could be made of the database I propose would be to allow Beall's list to be challenged, and perhaps improved. Would you not like to see Beall's list challenged and improved?

I did note that it may not be practical or feasible to create such a database. But the larger point I was making is that it is time for the research community to stop putting all the blame on rogue publishers and take responsibility for the role *it* is playing in allowing predatory publishing to exist, and to continue to grow.

Personally, I feel your approach to predatory publishing to be inadequate. It also seems to me to underline the fact that the OA movement is unwilling to try and tackle a problem that it helped create.

September 09, 2015 9:56 am

Mike Taylor said...

"You ask, who said that predatory publishing is only an issue for those in the developing world. I had thought you were one of those to have said this, but perhaps I misremember. "

Hmm. I think the issue here is implication. As an observable fact, it may be the case that most victims are from the developing world (I've not analysed this). I thought that your original statement was implying "... and so open-access advocates say that it doesn't matter". That's the part I was objecting to -- but to be fair, it's not something you actually said :-)

"On the issue of adding legitimacy to Beall's list, I suggested that one use that could be made of the database I propose would be to allow Beall's list to be challenged, and perhaps improved. Would you not like to see Beall's list challenged and improved?"

Yes; but not at the cost of starting the whole process by reifying it.

"Personally, I feel your approach to predatory publishing to be inadequate. It also seems to me to underline the fact that the OA movement is unwilling to try and tackle a problem that it helped create."

I don't see that at all. My approach tells *researchers* to straighten up and fly right, rather than blaming anyone else. Seriously. If you spend a year of your life on doing a research project and writing it up, why is it unreasonable to spend a further ten minutes checking up on the journal that you propose to send it to?

September 09, 2015 11:24 am

Margaret H. Freeman said...

Jon Baron made the point that I was thinking about too: that predatory journals have author fees. Being a published researcher who has never been paid (or get career advantages from my work), I ignore all venues that ask me to pay for publishing my work. I realise that this may exclude some legitimate journals who charge fees (are there any?), but one way of putting responsibility on researchers is to encourage them to seek publication in established peer-reviewed journals, as I do.

September 09, 2015 12:10 pm

Bev Acreman @ BMC said...

Richard, you may be interested in an upcoming OA campaign funded by OA publishers, industry bodies (OASPA, STM, DOAJ, INASP, LIBER, ISSN Centre) to try and address this through information - the site is only in beta, and I believe the campaign will be formally launched at ALPSP's conference this week: www.thinkchecksubmit.org

September 09, 2015 12:26 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Thanks for the link Bev. It looks to me to be more of the same.

What happens when an early career researcher looks at the editorial board of a predatory publisher and sees the names of several senior and respected scientists in their field listed? They assume all is well and go ahead and submit their paper. Why would they not? What better recommendation could there be?

But what they may not know is that a few months ago those senior and respected scientists were sent, out of the blue, an email inviting them to sit on the editorial board, and they accepted the invitation without bothering to check the journal out.

And since they accepted that invitation they have never been sent a paper to review and they have had no further contact with the publisher. They know nothing about the journal (beyond perhaps having noticed that another senior and respected scientist is listed on the editorial board), but they are happy to add the name of the journal to their CV and then forget about the journal.

If OASPA, STM, DOAJ, INASP, LIBER, ISSN Centre education etc. think that the answer lies in education, then can I suggest that it needs to extend its program to also address the huge number of researchers who are joining the editorial boards of questionable journals without doing due diligence?

September 09, 2015 12:51 pm

Marc Couture said...

“But as [...] John Bohannon has pointed out, the real problem is that DOAJ doesn’t have sufficient resources to be very effective.”

I don’t share Bohannon’s opinion. I wouldn’t so readily dismiss DOAJ’s efforts to transform its former list, based upon minimal self-reporting, to a white list where every entry will be double-checked. I’m about to fill the resubmitting form for a journal which has been in DOAJ for years, and we must provide a lot of information, with URL addresses to back it up. And they have asked for volunteers to check it. I plan to join this effort soon, and I hope many of us are. That’s not crowdsourcing, but I think it can be sufficient, and a more secure path than the one you propose here. Note than I believe in the virtues and potential of crowdsourcing, and that both approaches are not mutually exclusive.

September 09, 2015 1:43 pm

Mike Nason said...

With all due respect, I think this is a sort of ridiculous premise for complaint.

The allegation here is that OA advocates have done little or nothing to combat the fact that scammers create predatory journals and make money off of hard working scholars. And the implication if this allegation is that OA is dangerous or untrustworthy.

Imagine for a minute someone who is advocating for healthy eating. Do they spend their day trying to stop sales of gross or fatty foods or do they spend their time promoting good food? Do people then say, "listen, this healthy eating thing seems good, in principle, but there's still too many fatty foods out there and you're doing nothing to prevent me from eating them"?

Scammers exist because there is money to be made on ignorance. Full stop. This is the reason people get robo-called or the reason spam email exists. It is something the preys on the lazy or uninformed. There's no grand registry of all emails that are *really* spam. There's no listing of every street in the world where it is unsafe to tread without threat of mugging or theft. There's basically no guarantee of safety in life. In general. *But*, you can be street smart. You can arm yourself with the skills to know when someone is scamming you. And you should. Everyone should. These are life skills.

No OA advocate is ridiculous enough to say that scams aren't out there. And the scams aren't the *responsibility* of OA advocates anymore than Microsoft is responsible when someone calls your grandmother pretending to be a Microsoft support worker and asks her for her credit card. The problem with Beall's list is that it *completely fails* to acknowledge that this problem isn't exclusive to OA journals. Major publishers have fallen for scam journals. And, what's worse, major publishers with huge profit margins have their own APCs as well. APCs are specific to OA journals. This isn't a black or white issue. Beall's rabid mistrust for OA is reason enough to be wary with his list. But you're never going to have a full catalog of all things you should avoid. Or a full catalog of all things you should trust.

What OA advocates *can* do in this situation is help prepare people to know what they can or can't trust. They can promote awareness and literacy. But no OA advocate is *responsible* for anyone's lack of self-preservation or street smarts any more than an advocate for recycling is responsible for people who litter.

Scamming will wane when there's less money to be made. And less money will be made when less people fall for the trick. Scholars are faced with the same task of discretion that everyone with an email account first had. How do you know if this email is from a real person? Is this a phishing scam? Where does that URL point? Is this source trustworthy? Do I know anyone who knows this "editor/author"?

This problem isn't about OA. This problem is about folks scamming other folks for money on the internet. It is another place where users must be on their guard and think carefully about how they engage.

September 09, 2015 1:57 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Hi Mike,

My argument is threefold:

1. Many in the OA movement (which is a very small subsection of the research community) promote a method of scholarly communication (pay-to-publish gold OA) that is in practice an open invitation to unscrupulous people to exploit the public purse (if you accept that much scholarly publishing is funded by the taxpayer), and to prey on naïve researchers. It is also lobbying funders, governments and institutions to make OA compulsory, while denying that pay-to-publish OA is problematic in the way I describe or, if it is, the problem is tiny. I disagree the problem is tiny and think it has some responsibility for trying to resolve the problem created by pay-to-publish OA.

2. Those researchers who sit on the editorial boards of journals about which they know little or nothing (and turn out to be predatory) are complicit in the gulling of other researchers who see their names on the editorial boards of these journals and so assume that the journal can be trusted. I think those editorial board members have some responsibility for what is happening.

3. One way (which might or might not be feasible) of trying to focus minds on the problem is to build a database of those researchers who are (by sitting on the editorial boards) conspiring in the process of predation. Were it to prove feasible, I think this might be a way of getting editorial board members to take responsibility.

I understand you don't agree with me. That's fine.

September 09, 2015 2:34 pm

Anonymous said...

The problem of "outing" so-called 'predatory journals' and/or colleagues in the editorial boards of these venues is that, as the Beall list has demonstrated, it cannot be guaranteed that mistakes or errors in judgement will not be made, hence including legimitimate scholarly journals that happen to be researcher-led, independent or in languages other than English. Mike Nason is spont-on when he says

"This problem isn't about OA. This problem is about folks scamming other folks for money on the internet. It is another place where users must be on their guard and think carefully about how they engage."

Interestingly the elephant in the room remains traditional, reputable legacy journals that are in fact also only possible because of the volunteer work of academics, and whose publishers keep charging extortionate APCs so authors can 'choose' their open access options. While independent, researcher-led journals or publishers might see no other option than Article Processing Charges to publish open access, traditional, legacy publishers charge very high APCs for different reasons. Needing money to operate is not necessarily "predatory", just as being an independent or researcher-led publisher is not "predatory" by definition either. So the problem is not necessarily APCs, but the publish-or-perish climate of intimidation in universities, augmented by the demands to make "significant contributions to the REF" in the UK. Add to this situation that soe researchers seem to lack the most basic information literacy skills to detect a "predatory" email from a legitimate call for papers.

I agree with Cameron Neylon's post where he argues for leaving the "researcher as victim" narrative behind. Looking at an Editorial Board and recognising some reputable names is not enough to distinguish a "predatory" journal from its alternative. That researchers are willing to reply to emails from strangers, submit work and pay money to publish in venues that they have never heard of before, journals that have never published any papers they have read or cited or seen cited anywhere is indicative of a failure of information literacy, and of total desperation to comply with demands for productivity in highly-competitive fields.

September 09, 2015 2:54 pm

Unknown said...

Richard: tightening up the DOAJ criteria (developed in 2003!) was far from only triggered by the advent of questionable publishers. A lot has happened since 2003 in publishing and OA, as we all know. Never mind: Since March 2014, where the new criteria was implemented we have removed 700 journals, added 1500 journals, rejected 2700 applications and we are now dealing with the nearly 10.000 journals, that have to reapply to stay listed. This is a huge, huge job. We are working with volunteers as well as paid editors. But as Bohannon and others mention, we need more financial resources. It is easy to join the more than 100 universities(libraries) and the many consortia who support us: https://doaj.org/membership - https://doaj.org/members - you can follow the developments here: https://doaj.org/news

Lars Bjørnshauge, Managing Director, DOAJ

September 09, 2015 2:58 pm

Anonymous said...

Richard,

In your September 09, 2015 2:34 p.m. reply to Mike you say:

"Many in the OA movement (which is a very small subsection of the research community) promote a method of scholarly communication

(pay-to-publish gold OA) that is in practice an open invitation to unscrupulous people to exploit the public purse (if you accept that much scholarly publishing is funded by the taxpayer), and to prey on naïve researchers."

Who are these "many"? And why don't you include here the traditional, mainstream publishers that charge APCs? Why aren't Elsevier, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Routledge included as those establishing APCs as the main form to finance open access and therefore "an open invitation to unscrupulous people to exploit the public purse"? These are not rhetorical questions.

You also say:

"It is also lobbying funders, governments and institutions to make OA compulsory, while denying that pay-to-publish OA is problematic in the way I describe or, if it is, the problem is tiny. I disagree the problem is tiny and think it has some responsibility for trying to resolve the problem created by pay-to-publish OA."

Where is the evidence for this? HEFCE's mandate is for Green OA, therefore leaving the subscription model untouched and in any case encouraging at best the adoption of institutional repositories. Other funders like the Wellcome Trust might mandate Gold OA, but it is researchers who decide where to publish, and more often than not they will choose, again, the traditional publishers who offer 'hybrid' models and therefore charge the highest APCs in the market. Is the Wellcome Trust encouraging "in practice an open invitation to unscrupulous people to exploit the public purse" by mandating open access? I think not. I'd also like to see data about the number of publicly-funded researchers who have paid to publish open access in genuinely 'predatory' journals (i.e. apparently not Elsevier).

The problem of unscrupulous people scamming researchers ("predatory journals") might not be "tiny", but the reasons for the problem are not to to be found, as you seem to suggest, in

1) APCs as a business model
2) Open Access advocates
3) Researchers who agree to be on editorial boards of arguably "predatory journals"

This is a problem that, like crime in general, cannot be solved by merely naming and shaming the criminals. It's by tackling the causes of a demand for 'predatory journals' and by training researchers with better information and digital literacy skills that we have any hope of changing anything.

September 09, 2015 3:12 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Bo-Christer Björk has posted to the GOAL mailing list the manuscript of an article called *Predatory open access: a longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics* that will be published in a week or two in BMC Medicine.

Below are the results:

Over the studied period, predatory journals have rapidly increased their publication volumes from 53,000 in 2010 to an estimated 420,000 articles in 2014, published by around 8,000 active journals. Early on, publishers with more than 100 journals dominated the market, but since 2012 publishers in the 10-99 journal size category have captured the largest market share. The regional distribution of both the publisher's country and authorship is highly skewed, in particular Asia and Africa contributed three quarters of authors. Authors paid an average article processing charge of 178 USD per article for articles typically published within 2 to 3 months of submission.

And the conclusion:

Despite a total number of journals and publishing volumes comparable to

respectable (indexed by the Directory of Open Access Journals) open access journals, the problem of predatory open access seems highly contained to just a few countries, where the academic evaluation practices strongly favor international publication, but without further quality checks.

The paper can be accessed here.

September 10, 2015 7:05 am

Unknown said...

It is a repetition of my comment to some other forum. But I still consider it is also valid for this forum.

I want to ask some questions to Lars Bjørnshauge
I have some questions about the new approach of DOAJ for the evaluation of journals. 2nd version of the 'best practice' has been introduced in July 2015. Along with the need for more detail was a call for more transparency, added Bjørnshauge (http://sparc.arl.org/blog/doaj-introduces-new-standards). Yes transparency is the main demand during evaluation. Beall completely failed in this area. Now the way DOAJ is operating, I fear that it is also going to fail. Many people complained that Beall was completely subjective during evaluation. I fear that DOAJ is also going in the same direction. I got many forwarded message from OA publishers, where DOAJ rejected an application as: "Your journal has been suggested for inclusion in DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and I have recently evaluated it.
I'm writing to notice you that I have had to reject your journal, this since it does not adhere to DOAJs best practice. https://doaj.org/bestpractice"

Where is the transparency? Nothing. The mail does not hint anything about the weakness of the journal. The mail does not give any suggestion. It is self-contradiction of DOAJ's own policy as mentioned here: https://doaj.org/publishers#rejected. I suspect DOAJ is just matching the name of the publisher from Beall's list. If the name is present in Beall's list, it is just rejecting it with such subjective evaluation result. Is it the right approach? So for me the new evaluation effort of DOAJ is like this simple equation: Total OA journal minus Bealls list equals to DOAJ list. More is expected from DOAJ. Please don't repeat the mistakes of Beall.

I propose more scientific way to develop criteria for evaluating new (probable suspicious) publishers. I fully agree with R Poynder that a Binary system of evaluation has lots of limitation, as he correctly pointed that, "Either way, assuming a simple binary opposition of "good guy" or "bad guy" — as Beall's list effectively does — is doubtless likely to encourage prejudice and discrimination." I also oppose a subjective way of evaluation. An objective evaluation scale, say 0-100 score will be more scientific way of labeling different classes of publishers. I also dislike too many points of evaluation. I strongly dislike Beall's numerous points of evaluation. Therefore, I propose the new criteria should be very precise and should concentrate on the main service of a publisher (i.e. to work as a gatekeeper for academic scholarly publishing by providing peer review service). There should be weighting of different points as every point can not have equal importance during evaluation and so on. For me a publisher's basic service is 'to work as a gatekeeper for academic scholarly publishing by providing peer review service'. If they are not working as a gatekeeper and accepting all the papers for their own profit then they are cheating. It may happen that any new OA publisher is unorganized initially and has no big office, operating from a small apartment from a developing country, use gmail/yahoo etc but if they are maintaining the main service (peer review) properly, then they are definitely contributing. Here I want recall the comments of Maria Hrynkiewicz: "…but as long as they safeguard the quality of the content and follow the best practices in terms of peer review, copyrights and funding mandates – they contribute to the better dissemination of science." (Reference: http://www.nature.com/news/report?article=1.11385&comment=50956).

September 10, 2015 10:40 am

Unknown said...

I consider that Beall's list and intension are both highly questionable and flawed. Any study which assumes Beall's list as the starting point, is bound to give flawed conclusion. I request everybody (including Beall) to first rectify the list. This is why I don't support Poynder's proposed

methodology as presented in this blog. Sorry Richard. I also request Poynder to explain in details how his method will help to rectify Beall's list.

I politely request Beall or anybody to answer these doubts and questions
1. What is the outcome of Beall's Appeal process? Is there any public data? I am particularly interested to know the names of successful candidates from developing countries, as most of the people complains that Beall is harsh to these players. Appeal process was established in 2013-03-11. How many publishers/journals were removed till date? Beall once told that he removed only two publishers till date from his list. Reason: These two publishers left open acess model and embraced subscription model. Are all criteria of selection, Appeal etc are false?
2. Why there is no public display of contact of "four-member advisory board" in the Appeal page (http://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/appeals/)? If any new journal fails to show the contact details of its editors then Beall can call that journal predatory very quickly. But Beall failed to provide the contact details of the advisors in last 2.5 years. Is it acceptable?
3. How many days it require to remove all publishers (and journals) from Beall's list? Beall has provided us a simple calculation here: "Appeals are limited to one every 60 days. ((http://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/appeals/)" As of today 860 publishers are available in the list. So if all publishers want to appeal then to process the appeals it will take 141.4 years (irrespective of the result). As of today 741 standalone journals are available in the list. So if all journals want to appeal then to process the appeals it will take 121.8 years (irrespective of the result). So cumulatively it will take 263.2 years to process the appeals. For me this appeal process is simply an 'eye-wash'.
4. Why Beall is hiding one of his famous publication (http://triplec.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/525/514) about open access? I could not see it here: http://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/research/.
5. Is Beall not interested to remove publishers from his list? Initially link for the "Appeal" was prominently placed on the top banner of the blog. Many appeals were posted. Then slowly Beall placed that link on the "Other pages". So fewer appeals were there. Then Beall slowly placed the link of Appeal at the end of a very very long page (http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/). So the frequency of appeal further reduced.
6. Finally most important question. What is the fate of successful candidates who passed the test of Bohanon's sting operation (http://www.sciencemag.org/content/342/6154/60.full)? I have discussed this issue here: https://scholarlyoadisq.wordpress.com/. Most probably the answer is: A predatory publisher can not be successful irrespective of any kind of evidence of improvement. This is quite frustrating scenario. If any bad boy does some good job he should be encouraged. If that bad boy becomes good he can be an example to other bad boys also. In fact the teacher (here Beall) also can be proud to transform a bad boy to good one.

September 10, 2015 10:49 am

leo waaijers said...

The core issue in the debate, as I see it, is enabling authors to see upfront what a journal charges and make an informed decision based on the service the journal offers. This is the very purpose of "Quality Open Access Market" (https://www.qoam.eu/). It is based on academic crowd sourcing: librarians score the transparency of the web site of a journal, authors score the journal's quality. QOAM includes both the publication fees quoted on the web site of a journal and the discount negotiated via open access licenses.
QOAM results in four journal categories. If both scores are high the journal is tagged 'Strong'; it is 'Weaker' if both scores are low. A high score for quality in combination with a low score for the web site is an 'Opportunity' (to the publisher: improve your web site). Conversely, a high score for the web site with a low quality score is a 'Threat' (to authors: this may be a predatory journal).
All in all, I think this is more helpful in getting a sound academic publication environment than just a blacklist of editors.

September 10, 2015 11:40 am

Richard Poynder said...

Dear A Khan,

I do not have a detailed description of the database I have proposed,

although I do in my post indicate how I envisage it might (amongst other things) help to improve Beall's list. As I indicated, I do not know whether the idea is feasible or not, although I have had a couple of people approach me privately to express interest in exploring in more detail how it might work/whether it might work

With regard to your concerns about the DOAJ evaluation process, I would be interested in having sight of one or two of the emails to which you refer.

Dear Leo,

Thanks for the link to the QOAM site. Do you have any figures on usage? I believe it has been operating for several years now, but there do not seem to be many journals in the database. To my eye the site is over complex and not very user friendly. Might it help to improve the site's usability?

September 10, 2015 12:23 pm

From Morocco said...

Lars Bjørnshauge,
Cleaning "white list" from predatory journals is a daunting task, even toughening up the criteria, DOAJ still polluted with predatory journals. Just a simple example of a completely bogus journal AJER (see my comment [From Morocco | vendredi 29 mai 2015 à 12:50] in Rédaction Médicale et Scientifique: http://www.h2mw.eu/redactionmedicale/2015/05/arr%C3%AAtez-de-bidouiller-pubmed-en-croyant-faire-une-recherche-documentaire-trop-de-revues-open-access-.html

Not to mention among others, a publisher such as SCIENCEDOMAIN international with open peer review; without exaggerating, seeing the so-called Review History, really it's a complete joke!

I would like to know why you not taking the Beall's list as a reference to clean up the DOAJ list?

Richard Poynder,
- Interesting blog and proposal
- Your proposal on "editorial board members" should be taking seriously; if the list is established it will contribute successfully to fight against predatory journals
- There is another proposition "somewhat similar" published in BMJ by Mitchell S Cappell: List predatory journal publications separately from genuine scholarly publications as standard for CVs. http://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h2470

September 10, 2015 12:42 pm

Unknown said...

Dear A. Khan

I can assure you that our editors have been instructed to provide detailed reasons for rejections to journals.
We may have been sending faulty rejection mails occasionally without detailed reasons given. However as a rule we don't. We would be interested to know who is sending you these erronous rejection letters.
In answer to your question I can tell you that we do not automatically reject journals that are on Beal's list. In fact we do not consult Beall's list at all. We do not need to: all applications are reviewed by at least 3 people, often 4, and when we suspect journals of malpractice we do our own investigations and take it from there.
As we are currently processing a huge number of re-applications using the new criteria we anticipate to be removing questionable publishers from the DOAJ database for some time to come.
We do want to provide a reliable whitelist of OA journals and have always opposed establishing a blacklist.
The problem of predatory publishers does not go away by itself, but I agree with Cameron and with Mike Taylor that scientist should take the responsabilty to check journals out.
At the same time this suggests to me a possible way forward, different from making a database as Richard proposes.
If scientists take time to check out journals, they can also alert DOAJ of possible wrongs with certain publishers / journals. We will provide convenient ways in the near future to notify us of possible malpractices,

through the DOAJ website. This wil help us enormously to fight our uphill battle.

Tom Olijhoek
Editor-in-Chief DOAJ

September 10, 2015 2:40 pm

leo waaijers said...

Dear Richard,

Currently, 2400+ journals have a score, based on about 3000 Journal Score Cards. For its growth we are fully dependent on how much effort academia wants to invest in their own market place. The total QOAM set is 18.000 journals.
Complexity is in the eyes of the beholder, but QOAM is certainly more complex than a blacklist. The score card for librarians has 18 questions and takes on average 10 minutes to complete. The score card for authors has 4 questions and is done within 2 minutes. Sure, the design should be upgraded indeed. We are looking for a sponsor.

September 10, 2015 3:00 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Dear A Khan,

I hope Tom Olijhoek's response has addressed your concerns.

I recall that you have posted on my blog before, but not offered any information about yourself, or what your interest is in scholarly publishing.

I note you say above that you receive messages from publishers, but can you say whether you are a scholarly publisher yourself, or perhaps working with scholarly publishers in some way?

I think this is probably you here, but perhaps I am wrong?

September 10, 2015 4:57 pm

Unknown said...

Dear Tom,
Thank you so much for your detailed explanation. If any organization I believe, that is DOAJ. I consider that OASPA is having competing interest issues, as biggies will control total process (all governing bodies are full with the names of the biggies) or even may be selection of members. I very much appreciate your honesty when you say “We may have been sending faulty rejection mails occasionally without detailed reasons given.”. My respect and faith on DOAJ increased many fold with this. Thank you Tom. DOAJ is the last hope for small ‘so called predatory publishers’ who wants to be good but getting no way to remove the predatory label. Please please don’t see at Beall’s list, as you promised and please also request your volunteer editors to do so. Otherwise the complete exercise will go in vain. I like very much transparency. I have a request for DOAJ. Please make your evaluation process like an open page. For every single selected journal you are telling at least three of four reviewers are working and providing feedback. You may adopt wordpress blog or something protocol (similar like: https://doajournals.wordpress.com/). Make a single blog post for every evaluation. As you know MDPI is listed in Beall’s list and Beall strongly supports its inclusion. But you and OASPA consider it as legitimate. Now for example a journal from MDPI, named as Applied Sciences (2076-3417) there will be one blog post. In the first column your evaluation points will be listed (https://doaj.org/bestpractice)) and next three columns will be filled by your three reviewers. And all the positive as well as negative comments will be available transparently to the world. You are already doing a massive task of evaluating a huge number of journals. Now make it transparent and make a unique and first of its kind of example of evaluation to all organizations like IST TR, pubmed ebsco, etc. As you are already having the data only thing you have to make is to create the web-platform to publish it. Please forgive me if I am wrong or over optimistic of even unpractical.

September 10, 2015 6:47 pm

Unknown said...

Dear Richard,
I am a retired librarian of school from India (Bihar border). I have no direct interest in scholarly publishing companies but I have a huge indirect interest in open access. In my life, when I was a contract - temporary librarian, I have seen how poor students lacked of quality books due to lack of resources. I also could not get much traditional education due to financial issues. (please also forgive me for my poor English) I always dreamt that all poor and rich students should have equal access to books, etc. Then as per merit they should stand in life. But that was not the case. Then I came to know about OA around 2005, which I immediately matched with my old dream. I am unmarried and have a computer and net connection. My whole day goes with my old dream as I am quite reluctant in meeting peoples. You are right to mention that I am available here: https://scholarlyoadisq.wordpress.com/about/. When I started to write this blog with my poor English, slowly I started to get some comments/ emails from publishers, as they wrongly thought I may help them. Even Beall also wanted some information from me regarding one publisher (I am unable to disclose details, sorry). I hope this is quite lengthy self-propaganda and please moderate or cancel it as comment.

September 10, 2015 7:09 pm

Unknown said...

I have repeatedly told in many forums that “black-listing’ is not going to solve predatory publisher problem. Black-listing of publisher as well as editors will only increase the problem. Everybody knows that opening an ‘Open access publishing’ firm is not tough and resource intensive. If you black list one publisher then next day the owner of that publisher will open 10 or more similar firms. Beall or somebody may tell that how many sister concerns are there for OMICS (www.omicsonline.org) or Scientific Research Publishing (www.scirp.org). Each one may have more than 50 or hundred sister concerns. This may be another reason of exponential growth of these kinds of publishers. So isolation or black-listing is not the solution. Thousands of authors are there in developing world who will desperately publish. They don’t bother anything.
Then where is the solution?? Solution is in “divide and rule” policy. We have to identify some publishers who are wrongly labeled as predatory but doing good job. These small section of the publishers may not be as good as Elsevier, or Springer or Nature. But comparatively they should do good job than rest of the chunk of ‘bad publishers’. If these small section of comparatively good publishers get membership of reputed organizations like OASPA or COPE or DOAJ, then there is chance that their journals will be selected for reputed databases like ISI TR, scopus, pubmed, etc. Then these publishers will glitter in both financial as well as in reputation aspects. Then there is chance that majority of other ‘bad publisher’ also adopt same best practices. I can bet that majority of these ten thousands ‘so called predatory’ publishers are extremely financially weak. Opening an OPEN access publishing firm is very easy but running an Open access publishing firm from developing country is extremely tough. Bohannon’s paper proved that Beall was unsuccessful to do proper black-listing. I also agree with the comments of Phil Davis: (http://goo.gl/o07Z2B) “Similarly, the results show that neither the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), nor Beall’s List are accurate in detecting which journals are likely to provide peer review. And while Bohannon reports that Beall was good at spotting publishers with poor quality control (82% of publishers on his list accepted the manuscript). That means that Beall is falsely accusing nearly one in five as being a ”potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open access publisher” on appearances alone.” Please see my analysis here: http://scholarlyoadisq.wordpress.com/2013/10/09/who-is-afraid-of-peer-review-sting-operation-of-the-science-some-analysis-of-the-metadata/). What have we done to the small ‘so called predatory” publishers who successfully passed in Science’s sting operation of 2013. Simply nothing. But as per my conscience, a real solution is hiding here. "Award and punishment theory" only can solve this problem. Only Punishment will only increase the problem.

September 10, 2015 8:41 pm

Richard Poynder said...

1/3

Dear Ernesto,

Sorry for the delay in responding to your comments. But I do want to address the points you raised, if a little belatedly.

First, on the problem of “outing” people by means of blacklists:

As conceived, my proposal was that, if it were feasible, if it were acted on, and if it succeeded in its aims, a database like the one I suggested would help clean up Beall’s list. Is it better that Beall’s list continue as it is, or would it be better if attempts were made to improve it?

Second, on the role I see the OA movement having played in the rise of predatory publishing and your elephant in the room (legacy journals):

In its submission to the 2004 House of Commons Science & Technology inquiry into scientific publishing Elsevier said:

By introducing an author-pays model, Open Access risks undermining public trust in the integrity and quality of scientific publications that has been established over hundreds of years. The subscription model, in which the users pay (and institutions like libraries that serve them), ensures high quality, independent peer review and prevents commercial interests from influencing decisions to publish. This critical control measure would be removed in a system where the author—or indeed his/her sponsoring institution—pays. Because the number of articles published will drive revenues, Open Access publishers will continually be under pressure to increase output, potentially at the expense of quality.

Elsevier was right. APCs didn’t make sense in 2004, they don’t make sense today, and I can see no future scenario in which they would make sense.

Since then, of course, Elsevier has had to shift its public stance on APCs, but I very much doubt that this was because the publisher changed its mind. Rather it was because the OA movement succeeded in persuading institutions, funders, and governments to introduce open access mandates. Faced with a stark choice between converting to pay-to-publish gold OA, or face a rapid growth of green OA, legacy publishers would inevitably opt for gold.

But the point is that it was the OA movement that devised the APC, not legacy publishers. Moreover, as you indicate many OA advocates (as opposed to researchers more generally) much prefer gold OA.

It has also to be noted that it is possible to comply with green mandates by means of gold OA. And for so long as funders and institutions pay APCs, researchers will inevitably prefer gold OA since it is a much easier option for them. Again, it was OA advocates who lobbied institutions and funders to create OA funds in order to pay APCs.

In doing so they opened the door to a multitude of opportunistic, doubtful, unscrupulous, unethical, or simply incapable, new publishers. These too often charge a fee for a service they do not provide, or provide very inadequately. Call them fortune hunters, call them predatory publishers, call them what you will, but they have created a serious problem for the integrity of science.

The *key point* is that legacy publishers did not want open access, of any flavour. They would have much preferred for things to stay as they were. That is why they fought so hard, for so long, to withstand the calls for open access. But once funders began to push for OA, legacy publishers found themselves confronted by an irresistible force.

So, yes, I believe OA advocates are partly responsible for predatory publishing, and I believe they are partly responsible for the ravages being wreaked by hybrid OA to which you refer.

September 12, 2015 6:50 pm

Richard Poynder said...

2/3

Third, you say you would like to see the data on the number of publicly-funded researchers who have paid to publish open access in “genuinely” predatory journals. I guess you are implying that this is a non-issue. Anyway, I too would like to see this information, but I don’t think it is available.

What we do have is the soon-to-be-published paper by Cenyu Shen and Bo-Christer Björk, which I linked to in an earlier comment. This estimates

that predatory publishing increased by nearly 700% between 2010 and 2014.

The authors of this study nevertheless argue that these volumes will cease growing "in the near future". But personally I am not convinced by the reasons they give for saying that. In fact, the tide seems set to continue rising. Consider, for instance, the huge growth (slide 5 here) in Russian papers published in predatory journals in 2013/2014.

As I noted, those that *do* accept that predatory publishing is a problem usually go on to add that the majority of authors publishing in predatory journals are based in the developing world. That may be the case, but as the Background Briefing investigation showed, there is no doubt that authors in the developed world are also publishing in them. More importantly, given the context of my post, researchers in the developed world are sitting on the editorial boards of these journals. As such, they are implicated in the process of predation, and indeed facilitating it.

But in fact it does not end there. Some authors are also *willingly and knowingly* publishing in predatory journals, not because they have had poor or no training, and not because they are information illiterate, but because it suits them to do so. I was told by a researcher a while back that he had knowingly chosen to publish in a predatory journal "because I had to get something published in a hurry".

The authors of the above study have also noticed this phenomenon. As they put it, "Unlike many writings about the phenomenon, we believe that most authors are not necessarily tricked into publishing in predatory journals; they probably submit to them well aware of the circumstances and take a calculated risk that experts who evaluate their publication lists will not bother to check the journal credentials in detail. Hence we do not uncritically see the authors as unknowing victims."

Put this alongside the growing incidence of research fraud, including data and image manipulation, and fake peer review scams etc., and we might want to conclude that predatory publishing is actually only one component of a larger ethical crisis in academia.

Unethical and deceptive practices are fast becoming not just a short-cut to getting on in academia, but an acceptable short-cut (as we can see with gaming the impact factor and applying for grant money for projects that have already been completed).

September 12, 2015 6:53 pm

Richard Poynder said...

3/3

Given this backdrop, predatory publishing begins to appear an inevitable by-product of a pay-to-publish world. Not only does it offer new opportunities for gaming the system, but it provides researchers with an external agent onto which all the blame and opprobrium can be heaped.

But I see predatory publishing as a creature not just of the growing number of unethical publishers, but of the current culture of the research community itself, which has come to view the primary objective no longer to be that of doing good science, but of padding CVs.

In this light, the growing calls for more training and education look somewhat inadequate. If researchers are willingly engaging in unethical behaviour, education alone cannot solve the problem.

Moreover, focusing these educational efforts on advising researchers to be more circumspect when submitting to journals is to do but half the job. They need also to be warned off agreeing to join the editorial boards of random (and unknown) journals that happen to include them in their bulk email invitation programs, certainly not without doing due diligence.

The good news is that we can agree on at least two things.

We can agree on the need to stop thinking of researchers as hapless victims. In doing so, however, we need to insist that they accept responsibility for their part in the growth of predatory publishing, both as authors and as editorial board members.

We can also agree that the fundamental problem is the publish-or-perish culture. Again, however, if we accept that researchers are not hapless

victims we must insist that, instead of simply shrugging their shoulders at the absurd system (and its broken evaluation process) they find themselves in, they start challenging and changing that system.

In conclusion, it is my belief that if we want to explain the growth of predatory publishing we need to acknowledge the deeply flawed nature of the APC business model, we need to acknowledge the role that the OA movement has played in promoting that model, and we need to acknowledge the role that the wider research community has played, and continues to play in the process.

September 12, 2015 7:01 pm

Mike Taylor said...

"We can agree on the need to stop thinking of researchers as hapless victims."

Well. I certainly agree that we should not think of researchers as hapless victims.

But I'm not sure I agree that's something we can *stop* doing, because I'm not that's something any ever did think.

September 12, 2015 7:22 pm

Unknown said...

The reasons for the increase in predatory or deceptive journals are complex and are not amenable to simple solutions. Among the reasons are the current hyper- competitively in scientific research causing some scientists to take desperate measures; the dramatic increase in the number of research workers often poorly trained in research and publication ethics many from the developing world but not exclusively so; the use of journal articles as a “currency” in the academic world in deciding promotions, awarding tenure, hiring faculty or granting research funds. These factors together with human attributes of naivety, vanity, ingenuity and greed provide the millieu in which predatory journals together with many other unethical publishing practices flourish.

Blaming open access journals or even APCs is not the solution as the forces which allow predatory journals to thrive would find other means to manifest their actions in the absence of these channels. The reasons researchers publish in predatory or deceptive journals are varied and multiple solutions are required. For example, a whitelist of recommended journals would be a solution for those authors who publish in them due to naivety or inexperience. While for authors who wilfully publish motivated by laziness, deceipt or other vices , education involving reward and punishment is more appropriate. There are also publishers who through lack of experience, knowledge and skills may produce sub-standard journals and who are incorrectly labelled as predatory, these publishers require assistance and training and not blacklisting.

Above all it appears that the scientific research enterprise has taken a wrong turning and a lot of effort, education, training and mentoring will be required to get it back on track.

September 12, 2015 10:35 pm

Ed Rigdon said...

The list of players includes not only publishers and individual researchers, but also schools and accrediting bodies, linked through the use of publications as research activity metric. At the "highly successful" end of the scholarly success continuum, there are researchers publishing in a relative handful of highly respected journals, but toward the other end of the continuum there are struggling academics, and the schools that employ them as tenured faculty. These schools need to maintain good standing with accreditors, who, for their part, see scholarly productivity as one criterion--not just for a few faculty stars but across the whole faculty. When a school faces an accreditation review, with school administrators large and small knowing that too large a percentage of its tenured faculty have not met whatever "number of publications" criterion has been set, predatory publishers offer a ready solution, at a very reasonable cost (in purely financial terms).

September 13, 2015 4:20 pm

Falk Reckling said...

Dear Richard, dear Ernesto: some data of public research funders are available, see: http://mailman.ecs.soton.ac.uk/pipermail/goal/2015-September/003585.html

September 14, 2015 6:08 am

Richard Poynder said...

See also this comment on the Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek.

September 14, 2015 6:22 am

Liz Wager said...

I was intrigued by your suggestion that journals rely on active editorial boards to encourage submissions. As the Editor-in-Chief of a new journal I'm very conscious of the Catch-22 situation that nobody wants to publish in a journal they've never heard of. I'm therefore interested if we actually know how researchers (authors) identify journals (predatory or otherwise) for their work. My guess is that editorial board members are only a small part of the story -- otherwise, why would predators send so much spam? And I guess the picture may be different for 'big name' journals (I have no idea who is on the editorial board of The Lancet, nor have they ever sent me an email suggesting I should publish there!) But I agree with your conclusion (and Cameron Neylon's) that many researchers publishing in dubious journals are not victims but are using them to 'game' the system that measures researcher productivity by the number rather than the merit of their publications.

September 14, 2015 10:36 am

Richard Poynder said...

Dear Liz,

You said:

I was intrigued by your suggestion that journals rely on active editorial boards to encourage submissions.

My assumption (based on the many invitations that I receive, even though I am not a researcher, and on what researchers tell me) is twofold.

First, some/many of the spam messages sent out seem to have the name of a researcher attached to the bottom of the invitation. Often, I suspect, this is a member of the editorial board, or it could be a researcher who has agreed to guest-edit a “special issue”. So while the invitation might be bulk-emailed by the publisher it appears to come from a fellow researcher.

Second, the logical thing for a recipient to do on receiving a spam message (assuming the invitation is of interest to them) is to look at the journal’s web page and review the names of the members of the editorial board.

This is what I said in an earlier comment to Bev Acreman:

What happens when an early career researcher looks at the editorial board of a predatory publisher and sees the names of several senior and respected scientists in their field listed? They assume all is well and go ahead and submit their paper. Why would they not? What better recommendation could there be?

September 14, 2015 12:39 pm

waltc said...

A few random notes:

1. Traditional publishers are only too happy to charge author-side charges, but they call them "page charges" or something else. And, since traditional publishers increase subscription prices based on increased numbers of articles, they have *precisely* the same motivation for accepting papers as APC-charging OA journals do.

2. Building a new schema on the basis of a rotten foundation is not going to help matters, and it's to DOAJ's credit that they treat Beall's lists appropriately (ignoring them).

3. For that matter, I continue to be astonished at the eagerness of people

who should know better to build blacklists. So the Catholic Church and Senator McCarthy were right all the time? I continue to believe that blacklists are fundamentally bad ideas, and fundamentally at odds with intellectual freedom and growth.

4. As you should know, the Shen/Bjork small sample of "journals Beall calls predatory" is not the first study of those lists--I did a 100% study last year, reported in the July and October/November 2014 Cites & Insights (http://citesandinsights.info/civ14i7.pdf and http://citesandinsights.info/civ14i10.pdf respectively). Sadly, Shen/Bjork are either unaware of that study or choose to ignore it completely. (No, it's not in The Refereed Literature; neither are a number of items in that article's bibliography.) I'm wary of sweeping conclusions based on a small sampling of a vastly heterogeneous field, but won't go into a full critique of their article here.

5. On a side note, I've now published a comprehensive study of DOAJ-listed journals--let's call them "serious gold OA"--based on direct analysis of 9,824 journals. The publication is available as a trade paperback or PDF ebook, and a partial version is available for free as the October 2015 *Cites & Insights*.

Walt Crawford, independent researcher (and open access independent)

September 14, 2015 4:32 pm

Bjoern Brembs said...

When we (as researchers or as OA advocates or both) prioritize what problems to solve first, maybe we should have a look at the harm done? Who is harmed by, e.g. medical research not being accessible? Who is being harmed by GlamMagz aiming for the big headlines publishing fake medical data, e.g. about autism and vaccines? Who is being harmed about their research being accessible, but not in a peer-reviewed journal?

Sorry, but if a colleague of mine is conned out of a few hundred dollars, but gets his work published so that everyone can read it, this is actually much better, in my books, than a colleague who published in Science or Nature, gets conned to pay color or page charges to the order of thousands of dollars and then hardly anybody can read it.

I really have yet to see a single argument that convinces me that this is really something anybody needs to spend a single minute worrying about. I can't think of anything that could be lower on our priority list right now. It's like a company with a fantastic new product that everyone wants worrying that all the units that come in the color red will cost the company a dime more to make than all the other units. It's not even irrelevant.

September 15, 2015 5:26 am

Leonid Schneider said...

This helpful example I found by chance:
Fazlul Sarkar is proudly listed as Editorial Board member with the predatory publisher OMICS and its journal "Journal of Stem Cell Research & Therapy":
http://www.omicsonline.org/stem-cell-research-therapy.php
Sarkar is a full professor at the Wayne State University in Michigan, USA (so there goes the developing world claim) and a kind of celebrity, not only because a huge number of his papers is flagged for likely data manipulation on PubPeer, but also because he sued PubPeer to reveal the names of the whistle-blower.
http://retractionwatch.com/2014/12/10/pubpeer-files-motion-dismiss-sarkar-defamation-case/

September 18, 2015 12:11 pm

Felipe G. Nievinski said...

We have to start considering adaptation strategies in addition to mitigation. The problem seems to be here to stay. Worst-case scenario, eventually articles in predatory journals will become a significant fraction of the total. Nobody wants a crisis of trust in science. What if these venues evolve from exerting no peer review to offering mediocre peer review -- we need more discriminating means of separating the wheat from the chaff. Open peer review (OPR) is a clear option. PLOS ONE could turn up the heat on both traditional and predatory publishers by adopting OPR. It is the largest journal overall and represents the

prototypical APC gold OA embodiment. With great power comes great responsibility -- so why not unilaterally raise the bar? Did PLOS ONE become the new old already? APC may be the incentive for predatory publishing, but it's secret peer review that is the main enabler.

September 21, 2015 6:16 am

Mike Taylor said...

That is an excellent point. It seems absolutely ridiculous that PLOS throws away its reviews.

September 21, 2015 6:45 am

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